

To: Ashford Joint Transportation Board
By: Andrew Westwood Traffic Manager
Date: 12 March 2013
Subject: Beaver Road Bus Gate and Bus Lane Enforcement
Classification: Information only

Summary:

Ashford Traffic Restrictions

The current restrictions in operation in Beaver Road and Goddington Road were placed to ensure that cars are unable to use these routes as short cuts in moving around Ashford. They both have different methods of discouraging abuse, but also have both had particular issues. The Police do not see enforcement of traffic restrictions as a priority and therefore provide little support in stopping offending vehicles.

Existing Rising Bollard in Beaver Road

The automatic rising bollard in Beaver Road has been in place for a considerable number of years and was upgraded during 2009. It comprises two separate systems; the hydraulic mechanism to raise and lower the bollard and the authorised vehicle tag readers.

During 2011 a fault with the vehicle detection system appeared and was unable to be repaired due to spare equipment being unavailable and parts obsolete. A new method of allowing authorised users to activate the barrier was investigated, procured and installed in November 2011 using above ground sensors. New tags were also purchased and distributed to bus companies, taxi drivers and the emergency services.

Initially there were compatibility issues with the detection system and bollard control mechanism. Following resolution of these issues, it became apparent the layout of the scheme is not suited to the new method of detection and modifications were made. During further testing it became clear that some tags were incorrectly installed in vehicles and a particular type of bus windscreen was blocking signal. Again, further changes were made at the site both to the sensor locations and control systems.

Throughout this period the bollard remained in a retracted position to allow free flow of authorised vehicles along Beaver Road. This led to an increase in abuse of the facility by other road users so the Police were requested to provide some enforcement support which was not forthcoming.

In November 2012 the system was reactivated and closely monitored to ensure faults were rectified promptly. Whilst the bollard is now operational, there are still ongoing reliability issues due to the layout of the site and safety features that exist within the system. It is unlikely that with the existing arrangement there will be a wholly reliable restriction.

Camera Enforcement

The legislation to enforce moving traffic offences was included in the Traffic Management Act 2004, but the enabling legislation although promised has not been enacted so the original intention to enforce traffic restrictions using cameras has not been possible. There is a public perception that camera enforcement is a revenue generator and for this reason camera enforcement will only be allowed where there are clear benefits such as road safety. It has become clear that the current methods deployed in Ashford of using rising bollards and traffic signals are not working and are suffering from drivers abusing the restrictions. It is felt that the abuse of these restrictions is increasing the possibility of crashes occurring.

It is recognised that the current schemes do have road safety benefits in restricting these routes and encourage modal shift by assisting bus journey reliability.

The council is currently working with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council on a pilot scheme in the county to introduce camera enforcement at a particular location for safety reasons. This does require significant changes to the actual restrictions in place and development of new traffic orders that enable the enforcement to occur. A new agency agreement is also required to enable the county to delegate these powers to the Borough or District involved. This scheme uses different powers, the Transport Act 2000, and the subsequent enabling legislation.

After a full review of the implications in terms of the current safety risk it is considered that camera enforcement would be possible at the two sites in Ashford.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the county council and Borough Council work to develop a scheme for the introduction of enforcement of the traffic restrictions at Beaver Road and Godington Road.

Background documents:

Appendices

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